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8mm VS. VHS

and signal-to-noise ratios as good as most VHS or Beta hi-fis. Most of the current 8mm camcorders offer that superb sound only in mono, unfortunately. Some of the tabletop 8mm VCRs and one camcorder include PCM stereo, a digital audio recording system that tops anything currently available in *any* other video format, including the most expensive one-inch machines! As a bonus, machines with PCM stereo are also capable of recording only audio on the entire width of the 8mm videotape, offering up to 24 hours of audio on a 120 tape in the LP speed! The tape records for two or four hours, rewinds, and then records on another of the six tracks available for PCM audio-only recording. Some audiophiles are even using 8mm VCRs strictly for audio recording, a cost-saving alternative to fancy audiotape recorders.

One of the keys to 8mm's acceptance will undoubtedly be the availability of software—movies and other programs in the 8mm format. The small size of the 8mm cassette certainly is attractive to the video store owner with limited shelf space. Imagine being able to stock six times the number of tapes within the same space! No doubt the video store of the future will be loaded with 8mm tapes, but for now, selling film distributors on the new format is a difficult task.

Kodak and Sony, the two top 8mm manufacturers, have struck deals with some major distributors to offer at least 100 titles on 8mm, including such movies as *The Cotton Club*, *Kiss Of The Spiderwoman*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Witness*, *Big Chill* and *Moscow On The Hudson*. Sony, of course, includes a few dozen of their music video releases, and Kodak offers their tapes on photography and travel as part of the 8mm offering. There is even a CINEMA 8 movie club from which you can order 8mm videocassettes (CINEMA 8, Wellington, Suite 201, 871 Seventy Ave., New York, NY 10019). But Hollywood isn't exactly flooding the market with 8mm video releases. They know that most 8mm VCR owners also have a VHS machine, and copying movies is just too tempting when you have two VCRs.

8mm VS. VHS CAMCORDERS

Certainly the small size of 8mm technology makes the format a natural for camcorders. While the first VHS camcorders were large and bulky, their 8mm counterparts were slim and sleek. VHS camcorders have come down in size, as have some 8mm units. Today, some companies even offer both formats.

For those wanting the smallest, lightest camcorder, Sony's Handycam could be the answer. At 4¼×4¼×8½ inches, it can be carried in a large purse or among the socks and shirts in your suitcase. This three-pound engineering marvel records two hours of top-quality video and includes a built-in microphone. Due to its tiny size, it doesn't play back and lacks a zoom lens, autofocus and an electronic viewfinder. In fact, the only way to focus the lens is to select one of three zones. They handycam is supplied with an 8mm videoplayer for playback.

JVC's answer to the Handycam is their new Videomovie, the Gr-C7. It's a full-featured VHS camcorder with playback, autofocus, power zoom, record-review, and search functions. It even incorporates a solid-state CCD pickup device and HQ circuitry for improved picture reproduction. It's ⅓-pound heavier than the Handycam and about two inches taller. It records only 20 minutes in SP, or one hour in the slower EP, onto compact VHS-C cassettes. An adapter is included so the compact tapes can be played on a standard VHS VCR.

While both the Handycam and Videomovie are great when size is an important factor, their limitations should be considered by those who may be expecting a variety of applications for their camcorder. In that case, the full-size versions are more appropriate.

Sony's CCD-V8 is a camcorder hardly